

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEHRAN 07043 260923Z
ACTION NEA-10

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FOR NEA/IRN ONLY FROM CHARGE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, IR
SUBJ: RUMORS RE HEALTH OF SHAH

1. FOR THE LAST THREE WEEKS TEHRAN AND ISFAHAN (AND WE ASSUME OTHER CITIES AS WELL) HAVE BEEN AWASH WITH RUMORS RE THE SHAH'S HEALTH. AT EVERY SOCIAL OCCASION EMBASSY OFFICERS AND I HAVE RECEIVED ANXIOUS INQUIRIES FROM AMERICANS, IRANIANS, AND OTHER DIPLOMATS. BY NOW MOST OF THE HOME OFFICES OF U.S. FIRMS HAVE PROBABLY RECEIVED THE STORY OF ILL HEALTH. THE RUMORS RANGE FROM TERMINAL MALIGNANCY, LEUKEMIA, SIMPLE ANEMIA TO HAVING BEEN WOUNDED IN THE ARM OR SHOULDER BY GENERAL KHATEMI'S SON OR PRINCESS ASHRAF'S SON. THE LATTER RUMOR HAS THE ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT TAKING PLACE AT KISH ISLAND EARLIER THIS YEAR OR RECENTLY AT THE CASPIAN AND HAS ON OCCASION INCLUDED THE DEATHS OR WOUNDING OF A NUMBER OF SECURITY GUARDS.

2. THE SHAH WAS SICK (ILLNESS UNKNOWN) IN LATE JUNE AND EARLY JULY WHICH CAUSED HIM TO CANCEL A NUMBER OF APPOINTMENTS. HE THEN WENT TO THE CASPIAN ON JULY 6 OR 7 AND THE DAILY FLOW OF PICTURES IN THE PAPER OR NEWSREEL CLIPS OF HIS MEETINGS WITH THIS OR THAT

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DIGNATARY HAS BEEN ABSENT, THUS FEEDING THE RUMOR MILLS THAT HE IS INCAPACITATED. IN RESPONSE TO THE RUMORS A PICTURE OF THE SHAH AND SHAHBANOU AT THE CASPIAN APPEARED IN THE PRESS ON JULY 23 BUT THAT HAS DONE NOTHING TO HALT THE STORIES. SOME PERSIAN CYNICS CLAIM THE PICTURE IS A COUPLE OF YEARS OLD*

3. AS YOU KNOW, I SAW THE SHAH ON JULY 1 WITH MRS JOHNSON AND ON JULY 9 WITH UNDER SECRETARY NEWSOM. HE LOOKED A LITTLE TIRED BUT OTHERWISE FINE. HE DID TAKE SOME MEDICATION WITH HIS TEA DURING THE LATTER VISIT. GENERAL TOUFANIAN TOLD ME THE OTHER NIGHT THAT HE HAS SEEN THE SHAH TWICE A WEEK SINCE THE CASPIAN VACATION STARTED AND THAT THE SHAH IS FINE AND ENJOYING HIS REST. TOUFANIAN BLAMES THE RUSSIANS FOR STARTING THE RUMORS. OUR OWN SOURCES INDICATE THAT THERE IS NO DOUBT THE RUSSIANS IN FACT ARE SPREADING THE STORIES, BUT AT THIS POINT EVERYBODY IS IN THE ACT.

4. AT THIS TIME I TEND TO DISCOUNT WELL OVER 90 PERCENT OF THE NONSENSE BUT WE SHALL CONTINUE TO TRY TO KEEP OURSELVES INFORMED. WE ARE TAKING THE LINE, WHEN COMMENT IS UNAVOIDABLE, THAT "TO THE BEST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE THE SHAH IS FINE."
NAAS

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